

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MAGEN DAVID ADOM

Mr. FRIST. For 75 years, the Magen David Adom has served as Israel's emergency relief service.

Founded in 1930 by seven Israeli doctors and a one-room emergency medical service, the MDA has grown to play a major role working alongside the Israeli Army Medical Corps in times of war and peace.

Twelve hundred employees and more than 10,000 volunteers have helped countless disaster, accident, and terrorism victims within Israel's borders.

And on battlefields and disaster areas around the world, the relief service has distinguished itself with consummate caring, professionalism and bravery.

Even the United States has been a beneficiary of the MDA's humanitarian efforts.

Most recently, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina MDA Israel launched an emergency mission named "United Brotherhood" to collect donations, funds, clothing and other equipment for the New Orleans survivors who were left homeless.

Despite their indisputably noble work, for nearly 60 years the organization has been excluded from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The reason? The Israeli agency has been excluded for 60 years because of its decision to retain its own protective symbol rather than adopt the Red Cross or the Red Crescent.

Finally, this month, the impasse was broken.

An overwhelming majority of the state-parties to the Geneva Conventions approved a new protective symbol—a "Red Crystal"—to allow the relief agency to operate as a member of the global humanitarian movement.

Within Israel's territory, the agency will still use the Red Star of David.

Around the world, it will use the Red Crystal Protective Symbol, with the option of also displaying its traditional logo if the host country permits.

Aside from a few remaining formalities, the Israeli emergency service will, finally, at long last, take its place as a full member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

I would have liked to have seen straightforward international recognition of the traditional symbol. But the new Red Crystal is a worthy and fair compromise.

I commend the International Committee of the Red Cross and the American Red Cross for their efforts to bring this vital and life saving organization into the fold.

And I applaud the Magen David Adom for their compassionate and honorable work inspired by faith and carried out everyday with extraordinary courage.

#### AVIAN FLU

Mr. FRIST. In the 20th century, three influenza pandemics. The worst of the three, the 1918 Spanish flu, killed over half-a-million Americans and more than 40 million worldwide.

Secretary Leavitt warns that if past is prologue, the world is overdue for another flu pandemic.

The avian flu spreading from East Asia to Romania and Turkey looks and acts more like the virus of 1918 than of any of its more moderate cousins.

If it achieves the final step of human-to-human transmission, the consequences could be catastrophic both in loss of human life and economic meltdown.

Recently, the Congressional Budget Office released a study which I had specifically requested on the economic impact of a flu pandemic. The CBO predicts that the American economy could suffer a \$675 billion setback, a 5-percent loss in GDP, in the year a pandemic might hit.

The clock is ticking, and we need to act now.

We need to put the wheels in motion so that when and if the avian flu hits, America is prepared.

If we don't, and an avian flu epidemic comes to our shores, we will rightly be blamed for failing to do our best to protect the American people. The finger will be pointing straight at the Congress.

What we need in order to be prepared is a six-pronged approach.

We need communication, surveillance, antivirals, vaccines, research, and stockpiling and surge capacity.

This may sound like a lot of moving parts, but between our researchers, entrepreneurs, and public health experts, we have the intellect, the ingenuity, and the knowledge to get the job done.

My duty as an elected official and as a doctor is to see this through to make sure that we are adequately prepared and we can look our constituents in the eye and tell them we have done everything we can to be prepared.

Our economy, our country, and our lives are depending on it.

The President has laid out a comprehensive plan. It is our job, now, to set aside sufficient resources to tackle this looming threat.

I urge my colleagues to set aside their partisan differences and pull together to protect the American people.

The flu virus won't know who is Republican and who is Democrat, but the people who suffer will know who didn't get the job done.

We don't need to panic, but we do need to be prepared.

We need to act, and that is what we intend to do.

#### AFGHANISTAN

Mr. FRIST. On Monday, Afghanistan's first democratically elected Parliament in more than 30 years convened before the eyes of the world. It

was an emotional moment and one of great pride for the Afghan people.

As President Karzai told his audience of 351 new parliament members, with Vice President DICK CHENEY and his wife Lynne listening in the front row, "This dear Afghanistan has risen again from the ashes."

Here in the United States, we are full of hope for the Afghan people and we share in their joy.

They have suffered a long and difficult journey.

Twenty years of civil war. Nearly another decade of total repression.

But they have finally reached the shores of freedom, and the future spread out before them is one of hope, progress, and limitless possibility.

We are proud to count Afghanistan as a free country, a fellow democracy, and a friend of the United States of America.

This past year has been one of extraordinary events in the Middle East.

We have seen amazing images of people celebrating their newfound liberty—cheering, dancing and singing in the streets that they, too, are now free.

From the cedar revolution in Lebanon to the historic elections in Iraq, the winds of democratic change are blowing across Arab lands.

A new report by the highly respected human rights group Freedom House finds genuine stirrings of democratic progress: local elections in Saudi Arabia; women's new voting rights in Kuwait; improved elections in Egypt and the Palestinian territories.

The organization's director of research notes that, "Many people predicted that American policy in Iraq and elsewhere would set back the cause of freedom. This year's results suggest that hasn't been the case."

Indeed, I would go further to say that President Bush, our brave men and women in uniform, our coalition partners, and courageous citizens across the Middle East deserve tremendous credit for advancing the cause of freedom.

That freedom is bringing hope and optimism to millions of people long oppressed.

Last week's ABC News poll found that Iraqis believe their lives are going well, and nearly two-thirds expect things to improve in the year ahead.

Average Iraqi household incomes have skyrocketed by 60 percent in the last 20 months. Iraqis are quickly joining the swift current of modern life with cell phones and the Internet, cars, washing machines, and satellite dishes.

Another new poll in Pakistan found that in that Muslim country, public opinion toward the United States has dramatically improved.

Favorable opinion toward the United States has more than doubled since May to nearly half of those polled, while support for al-Qaida has plunged to its lowest level since 9/11.

Times are changing, and they are changing for the better.

It is true, we still face a terrorist enemy who targets innocent civilians